

[Gold Mining Lore]

W13861

BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS - OCCUPATIONAL LORE

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Title Gold mining lore

Place of origin Oreg Date 1/23/39

Project worker William C. Haight

Project editor

Remarks [CC?] Occupational Lore

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Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date January 23, 1939

Address 1225 S. W. Alder Street, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Gold Mining Lore.

Name and address of informant Carl Hentz, Fizzle No. 13, Little Canyon Mountain, Canyon City, Oregon.

Date and time of interview January 19, 1939, 1:00.

Place of interview 1225 S. W. Alder Street, Portland (relative's apartment).

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

None

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

None

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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A moderate priced apartment house: one small sitting room, a Pullman kitchen, dressing room and bathroom. A rust-colored davenport and chair, three wooden chairs, one table, chest of drawers, and a telephone constituted the furnishings of the rooms.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

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Subject Gold Mining Lore.

Name and address of informant Carl Hentz, Fizzle No. 13, Little Canyon Mountain, Canyon City, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates

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5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities
9. Description of informant
10. Other points gained in interview

1. German.
2. City of Doern, Province Vespereusin, January 22, 1877.
3. Refused to say.
4. Lived in Doern, Germany, until 1904. Immigrant to America. Since then has lived in Minnesota and Oregon. Does not remember dates.
5. No formal education.
6. Bricklayer, thasher, and miner. No accomplishments.
7. No special skills or interests other than visiting relatives.
8. None.
9. Mr. Hentz is approximately five feet, ten inches tall. His physiognomy is typically German. Clear, alert, blue eyes look through astonishing overhanging, shaggy eyebrows. His features have few wrinkles. Physically he is solid built, and looks unusually strong for a man of his age.

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2

10. Mr. Hentz said that all he knows about anything is in his head. No books put it in.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date January 23, 1939

Address 1225 S. W. Alder Street, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Gold Mining Lore.

Name and address of informant Carl Hentz, Fizzle No. 13, Little Canyon, Mountain, Canyon City, Oregon.

Text:

I was born in Germany. The earliest memory I have is walking beside my father out in the woods looking for trees to fell. As soon as we were able to aid father he put us to work.

By father was a wagon-maker. To obtain the material necessary for the construction of these wagons he had to cut his own trees. Early in the morning we would arise and tramp out in the woods to look for trees suitable for his use.

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When we found one that fulfilled all needs we would saw, trim and cut those damn trees till the blisters would stick out all over us. After getting the trees in shape we would pull them to father's shop.

There dad would season the wood, then prepare it for making wagons. His craft was an ancient one handed down from generation to generation. Perhaps father entertained the hope some of we children would follow in his footsteps, but none of us ever did.

My father was a stern disciplinarian. In those days kids were not coddled. We were here to work and nothing else. As an example of his sternness, at fifteen he sent me to work for a brickmaker. I don't know what I earned there because my father always collected the wages and kept them.

2

I worked in the brickmaker's yard until carrying the heavy hod broke my health down. Even then my father felt that I was probably faking it because I did not like the work. However, my obvious physical appearance soon became evident to him.

About that time one of my sisters had came to America and she wanted me to come and live with her. Once I started to go, but I received a letter from her telling me that America was suffering from a severe depression and I had better stay in Germany. This depression was during Cleveland's administration.

Finally, I made the grade and came to America. I settled in Minnesota on a ranch near my sister. We enjoyed muchly exchanging bits of information on the old country for news of my new land.

The first year I was here I lived with some German farmers and did not learn to speak English. The second year I worked for another German but he had some older children

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that spoke English. I helped them improve their German and they helped me to learn English.

Since then I have spoken only in English, though I write all my letters in German. Probably this is true because I don't know anyone here in America worth writing to.

I came out west to mine. It seemed to me that the best money could be made in mines in Oregon. I have been here in Oregon looking for my bucket of gold for quite a spell.

You know, every miner feels that the next day will bring the answer to all of his prayers. You learn to be optimistic when you are mining. You have to be. Hell, a pessimist for a miner is unheard of. At least, I have never met such a critter.

My home is on part of the location grounds of Fizzle No. 13, a mine located near the foot of Little Canyon Mountain in Eastern Oregon. The house is about a mile from a group of shacks that hover around a larger house on the side of Canyon Mountain.

3

The group of miners on Little Canyon call this cluster of shacks, Gukorville. The name comes from the fellow that lives in the largest house, Ike Gukor. Ike is Mayor of Gukorville, and Dean of the Mountain. He is as much a part of the diggings in that part as the ore we muck out.

In the evenings we grubbers, pocket hunters, hard-rockers, and placer miners hunch around the stove in Ike's house and do the best part of our mining. Say, we have panned out more millions in gold than there is in the whole durn mountain, while sitting around that stove.

The usual group around that stove includes Ike the mayor; the old man of the mountain, another fellow there that looks like one of them Snow White dwarfs—only dirtier; Pete, a half-breed Injun; and a couple of other fellows and myself.

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Once in a while we go to town and drink a few beers with the boys. It kinda depends on the amount of the weekly clean-up or pannings. None of us ever drink too much. You know you can't rattle with a lever of God's (shovel) all week and then be drinking your head off.

We usually hit for the hay about nine o'clock in the evening. If there is anything exciting going on, we stay and listen to the news broadcast at ten o'clock in the night. Them damn radios is really wonderful. Sure beats everything how you can hear people a long ways off. Say, I heard Hitler speak not so long ago. Odd, you know my sister that still lives in Germany told me she was listening to Hitler on the same day I was. Just think of it. She was sitting in her home in Germany and I was sitting in Ike's cabin up on little Canyon Mountain, and we heard the same speech. I heard the Pope one day too. It sure beats all.

Hitler is all right. My sister tells me that she is pleased with him. Everyone there has a job. In Germany that means something. Personally, I am grateful for the right to be an American citizen.

I am glad, young fellow, that you want to talk to me about mining. I would rather talk about the gold I am going to strike than anything else.

4

You're a greenhorn and that makes it all the better. I can tell you all about it and you can't interrupt me. The main thing is that gold is where you find it. To find gold you dig, dig, dig, and dig, and then most likely don't find any.

Recently, I located a quartz mine. That's a gold mine, but the gold is found in quartz rock. The quartz leader—the rock that leads you to the mine is usually found down quite a ways from the mine.

The rock rolls down the hill. Then you find the leader and start the hunt for the mother lode. I cross cut the hill. You know rock will normally roll in a fairly straight line. To allow for

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the usual deviation I figure out a straight line to where I think it might have come. Then I sort of pocket hunt by criss-crossing the imaginary straight line.

Often the quartz is near the top of the ground. Other times it will be seven or eight feet under ground.

When you go pocket hunting the procedure is slightly different. Most people pick out gold-bearing country to do their pocket hunting. Those that don't are greenhorns. A pocket of gold is just what the words say. It may contain any amount of gold. Pockets are found, at least it has been my experience in yellow, rusty ground. This is caused by the iron rusting out. You know iron is the mother of gold. Iron may rust but gold is everlasting.

I work my theory of pocket hunting as follows:

First I locate some yellow, rusty ground. Then I dig five holes, criss-crossing the ground. I number each hole with sticks and take out enough samples to get a fairly accurate analysis of the ground. These samples are mortared up, then panned. If the panning shows reasonable traces of gold I know from which hole the trace is coming. After finding the results of my pocket digging I go back to the holes I have dug, and dig in the hole that produced the heaviest traces of gold.

5

Not long ago I spotted a ledge approximately 330 feet wide, all showing gold-producing ore. The difficulty of mining this ledge lies in the fact of low-grade ore. A mucker like myself couldn't make his salt and beans mining it. A large company could make some money out of the ledge.

I've done some placer mining. Not much, though; too hard to get water where I am located. Placer mining is done by using a hydraulic system to move the ore and a sluice box to run the stuff through.

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Oh! I've done some hand-work, but that won't get you any place further than salt and beans. By hand-work you move all the dirt by that lever of God's (shovel) into a small sluice box. The sluice box is just an ordinary trough with little rills in the bottom of it. You usually screen the muck before you put it in the sluice box. Anyway, I always do, it saves a lot of extra work.

Drifting mining is used very little in this locality. However, before I went to work on the Fizzle No. 13, I did a little drifting on Vance Creek. In drifting you drive a tunnel into a virgin channel. Wheel out all the fine stuff and wash it out.

The thing I don't like about drifting on Vance Creek is those damn belly wiggling rattlesnakes. Jimminy Jack they're thicker than flakes in a snowstorm. I kinda like them in a way through. They're not as cussed as some men I've met. They will usually rattle anyway before they make things miserable for you. Damn little devils, I found them in my bed, on my floor; every place you would think a snake wouldn't be, there those bastards were. Oh well: if it wasn't for the rattlesnakes we'd probably have something worse. But on the mountain we don't have any, which pleases me very much. Least I sleep better nights than I used to on Vance Creek.

One time a friend of mine up on the mountain had rather an odd experience. He had started a mine on the mountain that always showed a prospect. However, the 6 prospect was not good enough to keep him there. You know, we miners have to eat. Just because a piece of ground looks good is no sign it will pay for your salt and beans. Well, that fellow, quit digging. He decided to try his luck on some other spot of ground. Try as he would, he could not get the idea out of his head that the other hole had a pocket. Occasionally he would wander back and half-heartedly dig around.

He kept this up for several months. By Jimminy Jack, he hit her one day for \$600. Nice little pocket.

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One day my friend Ike dynamited a tunnel he was working. For months he had been working this property but the gold was not there. In sheer disgust Ike loaded the tunnel with dynamite and watched her boom!

Boom she did, too. You know Ike always leaves his ground in good shape. After blowing her sky-high he decided to clean up. While wheeling some dirt in a wheelbarrow from what was left of the tunnel to the dumping ground, he noticed a piece of gold. Ike grabbed a shovel full of dirt and panned her. The first panning showed five dollars. The wheelbarrow load of dirt contained \$300. Ike made a good cleanup on that job. His life has been filled with many similar experiences.

Fizzle Number 13 is a regular woman. I have never seen anything like her. She beguiles me, taunts me. Damn her, she will lead me on with little pockets of \$10 or \$20, then abruptly stop. Fizzle holds something and by Jimminy Jack I am going to get it.

A fellow, Irishmen by the name of Shay, was working with Ike on a piece of property. The Irishman unable to entertain a placid nature soon convinced Ike that their mutual piece of property was not large enough to hold both of them.

This fellow Shay was a tenderfoot and a blowhard. He figured he would give the fellow a lesson in mining. With Ike's face straight he told the Irishman to work on some other property.

7

This property was most rightly—so we thought—christened “White Elephant”. Shay went in the back end of the tunnel and started to work. There was a large rock not too firmly embedded that worried Shay considerably. To remove this worry and the rock at the same time he put a shot underneath.

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I'll be god damned if he didn't blow himself into a pocket that held \$18,000. It beats all how these tenderfoots will occasionally whip through with a winner.

In a little hole that I started on the mountain I got the surprise of my life. I was about six or eight feet deep and finding nothing. I decided to give up the spot. When I lifted myself out of the hole I used a pick. The weight of my body made the dirt give way that the pick had dug into. Several days later I went back to the hole and just for the hell of it went down in the hole and obtained a pan of the leavings. The leavings showed a heavy trace of gold. For awhile I couldn't figure it out. Then it occurred to me that my pick had knocked off the dirt from the top of the mine.

This conclusion was correct. I dug around the top a little and the pocket ran to about four hundred dollars. All the fellows kidded me about being a greenhorn. You see it is the kind of an experience they usually tell on greenhorns.

By the way, did I tell you how the Greenhorn Mountains got their name: A greenhorn came into the small mining town looking for a mine. The boys after giving him the 'once over' decided he was looking for shade. They told him that under a large tree near the camp would be a good place to start digging. The most pleasant part of the digging would be all the nice shade he would have from the tree.

I'll be damned! The Greenhorn dug there, went down about seven or eight feet and he struck it rich.

8

He took the odd-looking stuff that he had found and asked a fellow in the camp if that wasn't gold. Poor_____, he didn't know gold from brass. To him rock was rock. Well, the boys told him it was gold. Hell, there wasn't anything else to do. He sold the mine for \$70,000. Can you beat it?

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Time for me to go now. Got to head back to Eastern Oregon so I can go take out a real pocket this time. Fizzle is still flirting with me and this time I am going to sneak up on her and get the real pocket she is holding.

Form D

Extra Comment

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Comment:

Mr. Hentz is a taciturn man. This seems to be a characteristic of most of the men that live his kind of life. Perhaps they are too busy to talk. There is little comment to be made, due to the necessary shortness of the interview.